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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003234

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SUBJECT: DUELING DEMONSTRATIONS CONCLUDE PEACEFULLY

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: The Friday night anti-Chen march led by former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairman Shih Ming-te attracted an unexpectedly large crowd of 360,000, despite rainy weather. The march ended at the Taipei Railway Station, where Shih and his movement are continuing their sit-in, aimed at pressuring President Chen Shui-bian to step down. On Saturday, September 16, supporters of President Chen responded to the anti-Chen movement with their own "Formosa Sunrise" rally, which drew about 60,000 participants to the boulevard in front of the Presidential Office. Despite a few isolated incidents on Saturday, Taipei police were deployed throughout the weekend in sufficient numbers to maintain law and order. End Summary.

12. (C) On Friday evening, September 15, anti-Chen movement participants marched from Ketagalan Boulevard, encircled the Presidential Office and residence, and ended at the Taipei Railway station. The first wave of the "Besiege the City" procession moved out at 6:00 PM and reached the station at around 10:00 PM. Despite light rain, police estimate 360,000 people participated in the march, which stretched for three miles. The crowd was enthusiastic but peaceful and included many urban middle class families and young people. Shih Ming-te, leader of the movement to "Depose Chen," knelt tearfully before a huge crowd of supporters at the end of the march, offering thanks to God and declaring the "siege" a success for proving that the people have the will to "clear away corruption" and uphold democracy. Shih called on participants to "keep on fighting" and again urged President Chen to step down. Following the march, Shih and his supporters continued their round-the-clock anti-Chen sit-in at the train station.

13. (C) The pro-independence Taiwan Society, with support from the DPP, countered the "Depose Chen" march and sit-in with its "Formosa Sunrise" rally at Ketagalan Boulevard on Saturday afternoon, September 16. Police estimated a turnout of 60,000 despite rain and wind. Most participants were bused in by the DPP from rural areas in central and southern Taiwan, where DPP support is strong, and tended to be in their 50s and 60s. Addressing the rally, Presidential Office Secretary General Mark Chen stressed President Chen's

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determination to stay on until the end of his term in May

12008. DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun, playing up the ethnic card, characterized the anti-Chen movement as "Chinese trampling on Taiwanese," and as instigating a "Red terror," referring to the red shirts worn by opponents of Chen to symbolize their

anger with the President.

14. (C) To avoid further inflaming the movement against him, President Chen did not attend the "Formosa Sunrise" rally. In visits to Penghu and Nantou counties over the weekend, Chen was greeted by small numbers of red-clad protesters with thumbs-down signs, the standard gesture calling for him to step down. Premier Su Tseng-chang and Taipei mayoral candidate Frank Hsieh also did not attend the Saturday rally, Hsieh citing his mayoral campaign and Su stressing his responsibility for public security. Vice President Lu was pointedly invited by the organizers to stay away, apparently in reaction to suspicions that she was exhibiting only lukewarm support for President Chen.

15. (C) The "Depose Chen" sit-in will continue at the train station until September 20, when it will return to Ketagalan Boulevard in front of the Presidential Office. Campaign organizers have scrapped plans for "anti-Chen" rallies in other major cities and for a series of additional marches in Taipei in order to conserve financial resources and to help calm emotions that led to some isolated incidents between anti-Chen and pro-Chen supporters on Saturday. Pro-Chen forces, who hold permits to demonstrate on Ketagalan until September 20, have announced they will not conduct large-scale rallies, a decision Frank Hsieh described as returning the boulevard "back to the people." Shih shows no sign of giving up his protest, absent a Chen resignation, and there is now talk of trying to mount a major demonstration to coincide with Taiwan's national day celebration on October 10.

Comment

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16. (C) The curtailing of some marches and rallies planned for the week, while probably a welcome break to many Taipei

TAIPEI 00003234 002 OF 002

residents and commuters, may prove only a temporary respite in the ongoing battle. The return of Shih's sit-in to Ketagalan will provide another opportunity to try to bring out anti-Chen protesters en masse. The upcoming anniversary celebration in Kaohsiung of the DPP's founding at the end of the month presents an occasion for pro-Chen supporters to express their views. So far, the anti-Chen movement does not seem to be shaking the President's support base. Instead it is stimulating most in the DPP and its allies to rally around, rather than desert, the President. Chen's biggest challenge, however, may come in the weeks or months ahead when the prosecutor completes his investigation into the use or misuse of Presidential Office special funds and related issues.

YOUNG